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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0693
INFO RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 8289
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3658
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ AUG LIMA 3340
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 4522
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SUBJECT: GOE INTERVENTIONS RE H1N1

REFTEL A: STATE 73971
B: QUITO 597

1. (SBU) As of July 29, the GOE reports 17 fatalities from AH1N1 flu in Ecuador, with a total of 534 confirmed cases. However, as many influenza cases go unreported, the real number of AH1N1 cases is probably much higher.

2. (SBU) On July 23, in a widely broadcast interview with the popular Radio Sonorama, President Correa praised the actions of the Ministry of Health (MOH) and said that Ecuador had a low level of AH1N1 cases compared to other countries in the region. He also urged Ecuadorians not to travel to countries with a "high level of incidence" of the virus, such as the U.S., Mexico, and Argentina. So far there has been very little reporting in the press about Correa's comments.

3. (SBU) In response to ref A, this cable details the actions the GOE has implemented in response to AH1N1 flu and the dates each intervention was imposed. Some of the interventions were reported in ref B.

4. (SBU) The following public health interventions were instituted by the GOE as a part of its AH1N1 Flu Containment Strategy in place since April 2009:

--On April 28, the MOH warned citizens and visitors to take standard flu season precautions to prevent the spread of the virus.

--Quarantine policies were first announced on April 24.

--An Emergency Declaration was first issued on April 29, when President Correa issued Decree 1693. This declared a "state of emergency" due to the rapid propagation of the virus and its harmful effects on human health.

--On May 15, the GOE ordered the first quarantine for a household where an infection was identified. Quarantine was ordered for the first case identified in Guayaquil and for subsequent cases.

--The first school closure also occurred on May 15 in Guayaquil. Many other schools have subsequently been closed, but shortly thereafter returned to normal activities. Most schools in the central Sierra region have closed for summer vacations until mid-August.

--The first theater was closed on July 22. There have been additional closures, but most theaters remain open for business and some large concerts have taken place.

--On July 28, the MOH issued new emergency regulations that give it expanded authority to postpone or cancel any public event.

5. (SBU) Before and after the first case of AH1N1 flu was confirmed

in Ecuador, the MOH has followed the World Health Organization's guidance in order to strengthen its surveillance and response system and prevent the rapid spread of the virus. The MOH has ordered private and public health providers to report and closely monitor respiratory and influenza cases. When AH1N1 cases are identified, they must be referred to the two reference hospitals in Ecuador for appropriate AH1N1 tests and treatments. As several recent AH1N1 deaths in Ecuador have indicated, however, these instructions have not always been followed by small medical clinics (ref B).

16. (SBU) Since the first case of AH1N1 flu was confirmed, the GOE has launched national press, TV, and radio awareness campaigns. It has also begun direct training of public health providers and school teachers. Airport and seaport controls have been established, with officials using thermal imaging equipment to screen passengers at the Guayaquil and Quito international airports. Ecuador has purchased 220,000 doses of Tamiflu and personal protection equipment for public health providers. In addition, the GOE has reserved 550,000 doses of a future vaccine against AH1N1.

Hodges